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ABSTRACT

Some of the metaphors that continue to guide educators' ways of understanding classroom life and education research have conceptual boundaries and limitations. These metaphors are referred to as Cartesian in order to locate them historically and within a cultural setting. The first type of metaphor serves as a conduit of language, in which ordinary discourse tacitly generates a linear, sender-receiver model for thinking about the nature of human communication. A second is the metaphor of the autonomous individual in which the individual's behavior and characteristics are the primary sources of reason, thought, and moral authority. This metaphor shapes tacit images of scholarship, intelligence, work, and self. The third is a metaphor of technical rationality which identifies thought and knowing as an explicit re-presentation of the outside world inside a person's head. An alternative to the Cartesian metaphor is the ecology metaphor which examines the relationship and interactions between the components within a system. The primary implications of an ecological perspective rest in the evaluative criteria that this perspective brings to qualitative inquiry. (Twenty-five references are included.) (KEH)

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ON THE POETICS OF NARRATIVE IN CLASSROOM RESEARCH

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This paper is on the metaphorical foundations of qualitative inquiry. Narrative as well as epitemological traditions naturally bind qualitative inquiry to metaphor. This, however, is not my only reason for considering their close and intimate relationship. In recent years the growing diversity of qualitative methods has introduced acrimonious debate over the basic questions of what constitutes research and how it should be evaluated.[1] While this turbulence of claims and counter-claims has invigorated the field, it has also served to confuse rather than clarify the directions in which we are now headed.

My thesis is that an understanding of metaphor promises to restore some clarity to our work. The type of understanding I have in mind is largely a matter of being at home with the beauty and power of language. This is what Robert Frost once referred to as "education by poetry" (Cox and Latham, 1968). It includes a sense of where metaphors originate, their history, how they guide cultural patterns of thought, and where they are likely to break down.

Our most familiar experience with metaphor comes not from poetry but from its ordinary use as a descriptive and analogic device. In my first paragraph, for example, I use a variety of analogic metaphors, including: paper, foundations, bind, close, growing, introduced, and so forth. Even a self-conscious move away from literary styles of speaking and writing cannot free us

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[1] See, for example, the exchange between Ray Rist and Thomas Barone (1987).

from the pervasive language of metaphor. Yet this notion of metaphor as a linguistic device is certainly wrongheaded for it has already led us into talking about words as if they were our servants--functionaries employed to carry out whatever commands we desire. In significant ways we simply do not command words; they command us.

This is one of the central lessons of poetical education. It can be readily illustrated by considering "generative metaphor," a term used by Donald Schon (1979) to highlight how analogic language acts as a type of conceptual guidance system. Generative metaphors make one domain of experience known in terms of another by drawing an implicit comparison between the two. The metaphor "classroom management," for example, takes its source domain from business and industry where management specifies both a group of people and how they function at a particular organizational level within a company or corporation. Its target domain is taken from certain types of behavior that may be used to characterize dimensions of classroom teaching. The metaphor makes sense by bringing forward how the target domain is similar to the source domain. In this example, the similarities focus on issues of hierarchical status, accountability, order, and methods of control, including the establishment of rules -- what Walter Doyle (1986) refers to as a "work system" -- and the enforcement of those rules. At the same time the metaphor necessarily destroys knowledge by putting out of focus the differences between these two domains of experience

(i.e., aspects of classroom life that distinguish it from a business or industrial setting). Regardless of whether or not we explicitly recognize the influence of this metaphor on how we think about the classroom, it reproduces (generates) historically-grounded patterns of understanding. These patterns, in turn, "command" us to pay close attention to some dimensions of instruction while neglecting others. Elliot Eisner (1985:64-65) put this most succinctly in noting that whenever we build a window we also build a wall.

Another significant characteristic of generative metaphors is that the analogies upon which they rest are only implied rather than stated in any direct way. That is, the metaphor classroom management does not make sense unless we presuppose that teaching (the target domain) is like some form of small-scale production management. In this respect the word "teaching" takes on a metaphorical status even though we do not typically recognize it as a metaphor. It is given this status because our discourse on classroom management, teaching strategies, curriculum implementation, and so forth generates a set of associated images that we can easily identify with classroom teaching. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) refer to such metaphors as ontological. I will use the term iconic, following the lead of Richard Brown (1977), in order to emphasize how words encode interpretive images mapped onto experience. Iconic metaphors are even more pervasive than are strictly analogic metaphors. Examples include not only teaching but also work,

home, family, school, classroom, learning, individual, art, science, language, intelligence, progress, food, professional, time, distance, God, nature, power, and so on. The schematic images that we hold for these words make up the taken-for-granted walls and windows of experience (to use Eisner's metaphor). Mary Douglas (1975:4) notes that such backgrounded, self-evident knowledge,

> ...is regarded as too true to warrant discussion. It provides the necessary unexamined assumptions upon which ordinary discourse takes place. Its stability is an illusion, for a large part of the discourse is dedicated to creating, revising, and obliquely affirming this implicit background, without ever directing explicit attention upon it.

An example of this process can be illustrated with the iconic metaphor "work." Our Western and largely masculine images of work as a set of activities for which an individual receives monetary compensation have been sustained through social discourse in a wide variety of settings. Yet recently our understandings of work (as well as other iconic metaphors) have been challenged (foregrounded) by feminist thinkers concerned with bringing into focus the relational dimensions of work and activities (e.g., housework) for which people do not receive a salary. Whatever images of work prevail during this period of foregrounding will eventually resume the status of background knowledge and become a part of the cultural history embedded in our language.

This point would be of little concern if all iconic metaphors were created equal, but they are not. While all

metaphors have conceptual boundaries and will always break down at some point, they are not equally powerful in bringing forward the language-culture-thought connections that the metaphorical nature of language itself illustrates. It is, in other words, metaphors and not simply the process of metaphorical structuring that deserve close attention. This is my basic rationale for wanting to examine some of the metaphors that continue to guide our ways of understanding classroom life and education research.

Metaphors in Cartesian Thought

Under this heading I identify key metaphors that will require careful considerations as we move forward with qualitative forms of inquiry. In doing so I rely heavily on the work of Bowers (1987) and Bowers and Flinders (1989). My focus on three particular metaphors is not meant to exclude others that may be as significant, nor imply that their development here can be regarded in any way as comprehensive. My aim is only to sketch out the conceptual boundaries of these metaphors and thereby suggest their limitations. I refer to these metaphors as Cartesian in order to locate them historically (and within a cultural setting). The seventeenth century philosopher Rene Descartes is well known for articulating a modern perspective, and it is this perspective that gives shape to distinctive images of language, the individual, and rationality.

The first metaphor I have already mentioned in noting that words (language) are often viewed as a tool we use for

transmitting our thoughts and ideas. This view is demonstrated in how we typically talk about language. Michael J. Reddy (1979:286) provides the following examples:

(1) Try to get your thoughts across better

(2) None of Mary's feelings came through to me with any clarity

(3) You still haven't given me any idea of what you mean.

In these examples, the verbs "get across," "came through," and "given" are dead analogic metaphors that presuppose what Reddy calls the conduit view of language. Many other examples could be cited (Reddy provides a list of almost 150 common expressions), including: that word carries a lot of baggage, his words conveyed a clear sense of excitement, her book is loaded with interesting ideas, and the candidate's speech was filled with empty rhetoric. These examples suggest a few ways in which ordinary discourse tacitly generates a linear, sender-receiver model for thinking about the nature of human communication. According to this model, a sender first formulates an idea and then puts it into words (encodes a message). The message is next transmitted via some channel or media (e.g., print) to a receiver. Finally, the receiver unpacks (decodes) the message and may then formulate a response.

The conduit view of language presupposes two particularly interesting notions. First, it implies that language is detachable and thus separate from thought and meaning. Language, in other words, is only the means for expressing thought.

Second, the conduit view assumes that meaning is thing-like; it can be put into words just as milk is put into bottles, furniture into a house, or gasoline into an automobile. These presuppositions establish the conceptual boundaries of the conduit metaphor, and while they make sense as a way of talking about language, they also put out of focus the power of language and its multi-dimensionality. On the one hand, in separating language and thought, the sender's formulation of ideas remains unaffected by the language (culture) used in transmitting ideas. This puts out of focus the influence of culture, including how metaphors tacitly generate patterns of understanding. On the other hand, the assumption that meaning is thing-like suggests that it can stand on its own and that explicit messages are capable of "speaking for themselves." This puts out of focus forms of metacommunication that necessarily accompany all explicit messages in order to frame their meaning.

Metacommunication allows us to show that we mean by what we say. It relies not on words, but on actions (including nonverbal cues such as voice tone and rhythm, body gestures, and the use of space). For example, when we "receive" a message such as "Put on your jacket," we implicitly ask ourselves not one but two questions: 1) What do these words mean? and 2) Why were they spoken? The first question has to do with the lexical and syntactic meaning of words. The second is concerned with the act of speaking. We thus receive two messages. One message, "Put on your jacket," is information. The other is information about

information. This metamessage might be interpreted as, "I'm telling you what to do, how to behave. I have power to influence your actions." Or, it might be interpreted as, "I care about you and don't want you to be cold." In order to gain some clue as to which metamessage is intended (or how the message is framed) we do not look to the message itself but to its context, tone of voice, facial gestures, and so on.

Yet the conduit view of meaning as thing-like neglects this meta-level of understanding by putting into focus how we are able to communicate about things. That is, at an explicit level we talk about the weather, baseball games, films, books, restaurants, foreign policy, our families, and our work. This, as I understand it, is one of the distinctive characteristics of human language.[2] Still, the ability to reference objects (what might be called giving and receiving object-information) is most often the secondary rather than the primary function of communication. For example, rarely do we talk about the weather, or our families, or even our work because we are genuinely interested in exchanging object-information. Deborah Tannen (1986:15), a sociolinguist, put it this way:

> Very little of what is said is important for the information expressed in words. But that doesn't mean

[2] How as a species we developed this linguistic trick of being able to specifically reference objects is far beyond my expertise. Yet it is interesting to speculate on the possible connections between language and our physiological dexterity--having arms and hands that are so useful for picking up objects, moving them about, turning them over, throwing them, etc.

> that the talk isn't important. It's crucially important as a way of showing that we are involved with each other, and how we feel about being involved. Our talk is saying something about our relationship.

Communication, whether it goes on in a classroom or at a professional conference is as much about courting involvement, establishing rapport, learning whether we are liked or disliked, gaining the respect of others, maintaining a status hierarchy, and expressing loyalties as it is about conveying object-information. These relational functions are obscured by a conduit view of language, and as long as we remain within the conceptual boundaries of this metaphor, the cultural patterns of thought it generates will implicitly draws us back to viewing curriculum as a collection of facts and classroom teaching as a delivery system.

A second Cartesian metaphor, closely related to this view of language, is the metaphor of the autonomous individual. Descartes' most noted statement Cogito, ergo sum implicitly set the foundations for understanding the individual ("I") as the primary source of reason, thought, and moral authority. Later this view was extended to include the individual as a source of political authority. Today we discuss both political and educational leadership, for example, terms of the behaviors and characteristics of individuals. But this view is much more deeply embedded in our cultural patterns of thought than suggested by popular notions of what it means to be a leader. It also shapes tacit images of scholarship, intelligence, work, and self. It is the individual, encapsulated in several square yards

of skin, that reads, writes, thinks, reasons, labors, learns, feels, and is self-actualized. Here again language and metaphor play a significant role in sustaining and reproducing this cultural understanding. We hold individuals accountable from an early age, encouraging students, for example, to "think for yourself," "do your own work," "no talking during the test," and so on.

In purely analogic terms, the individual is not dividable. We can remove individuals from their families, friends, schools, neighborhoods, and relocate them thousands of miles across the country or send them on fantastic journeys into space, but our language does not allow us to remove the individual from the individual. Such ways of thinking are so deep-seated and taken for granted that we find it difficult to recognize our understanding of the individual as a metaphor and thus having identifiable boundaries. But the self neither begins nor ends at our finger tips for they can be removed surgically, or extended through the keyboard of a computer or the artist's paint brush. What, then, are the boundaries of this metaphor? Where does it break down and refuse to yield coherent meaning?

First, the individual metaphor breaks down in coming to terms with ourselves and others as cultural beings. We only create culture by living it, or, as Martin Heidegger (1962) suggests, the worlds we live are already made with established ways of thinking, relating, and acquiring knowledge. These cultural patterns (traditions) are given to us in the

metaphorical nature of language, nonverbal forms of communication, the design of our homes, the organization of our workplaces, systems of government, dress, the ways we prepare food, and the architecture of our schools. Driving along the California and Oregon coastal highways one is still able to find small-town "New England" one-room schoolhouses. These now empty and abandoned schools were brought across the country as part of the cultural baggage that reflected an earlier image of education. Such mental-symbolic baggage cannot be left behind regardless of where we travel. Nor can it be removed surgically. It is, in other words, the individable aspects of our individuality that locate us in a cultural and historical world.

Second, by isolating thought inside a person's head (or affect inside a person's heart), the metaphor of the autonomous individual puts out of focus how we are interdependent with one another and with our biotic environment. This connectedness is in part what feminist authors have tried to bring forward and reclaim as a basis for understanding life experience in a variety of domains. Carol Gilligan (1982) in human development, Nel Noddings (1984) in ethics, Evelyn Fox Keller (1987) and Susan Bordo (1987) in science, and Mary Field Belenky, et al. (1986) in education serve as examples. In the classroom, such relational perspectives are obscured by curricula that portrays scientists as asexual, ethical conduct as a matter of values clarification, art and language as a means of individual expression, mathematics as detached from ordinary experience, and athletics as an arena

for individual competition. The autonomous individual metaphor is also very much with us in educational research where examples range from research on teacher decision-making to neo-marxist curricular studies concerned with individual emancipation and empowerment.

While the conduit view of language separates sender, message, and receiver, our metaphorical understanding of the autonomous individual separates self from other. This theme of separating is also represented in a third metaphor that Donald Schon (1983) refers to as technical rationality. This metaphor takes its foundations from a Cartesian understanding of thought. Decartes' view of reason as infallible <u>if left to itself</u> separates mind from nature. In order to maintain this separation we must imagine a rational person as one who sits down and, in the privacy of his or her own thoughts, thinks through a problem. From this perspective, what is meant by "thinks through" involves a process of mirroring in conscious awareness some element of nature. Thought and knowing are thus understood as an explicit re-presentation of the outside world inside one's head. Decartes' writings model this high level of self-consciousness and distance as a pathway to explicit knowledge.

Such a methaporical understanding of thought and reason is so readily taken for granted in our culture that authors have been compelled to "invent" a special vocabulary in order to talk about forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that are not explicit. Examples include Michael Polanyi's (1964) "personal

knowledge," Mary Douglas' (1975) "implicit meanings," and Donald Schon's (1983) "knowing-in-action." In using these terms to foreground ways of knowing that would otherwise go unrecognized, such writers help us identify the conceptual boundaries of rationality as an iconic metaphor. Specifically, this metaphor puts out of focus knowledge in the world as opposed to knowledge of the world. Knowledge in the world includes the socio-political dimensions of knowing as well as a cultural understanding of rationality itself.

In education, technical rationality has tacitly guided much of our thinking about instructional practices. Consider briefly two examples. The first, Ralph Tyler's (1949) rational for curriculum development, is well known and has been widely critiqued (see, for instance, Kliebard, 1981). Here I simply wish to note that Tyler's approach continues a long technicist tradition grounded on an understanding that ties rationality directly to explicit, objective knowledge. It is this understanding that leads to context-free techniques for formulating goals, designing activities, and so forth. Development, in other words, is framed as a mindful activity: premeditated, fully intentional, and thus assumed to be culture-free. My second example is not from the curriculum field, but from the literature on classroom management. Yet, as in curriculum, the predominant concerns in classroom management have been to make explicit context-free techniques for the unilateral control of others. This includes such recommendations as posting

an explicitly stated set of class rules at the front of the room, verbally announcing behavioral expectations, and writing on the chalkboard the names of students who have failed to comply with the teachers' expectations. Such recommendations, guided by Cartesian rationality, have remained silent on how the techniques themselves signal implicit metamessages regarding the teachers power and communicative rights. These metamessages are educationally significant in that as they set the stage for learning adult roles.

A separation between mind and nature guides our notions of educational research as well as our recommendations for practice. The research community may have some misgivings with Edward L. Thorndike's 1906 statement that, "The sciences of biology...give the laws of changes in bodily nature. The science of psychology gives the laws of changes in intellect and character." Yet it would be naive not to recognize that much of our work still perpetuates this dualism. To put this another way, knowledge of the world continues to overshadow knowledge in the world. Critical theorists in the curriculum field have taught us to see knowledge in its political context, but they often fail to acknowledge how their own metaphors ("class," "production," "empowerment") are culturally grounded. Research on teaching still clings to notions of effectiveness as a matter of explicit decision making and program implementation as a matter of developing the right techniques. This leaves us in a very curious position. In a profession as conspicuously relational as

is teaching, we have little understanding of how teachers are able to read the multiple levels of communication that characterize classroom life, how they are able to balance power with solidarity, how the use of print as well as other technologies frame school knowledge, how patterns of turn-taking or the use of humor comment on student-teaching relationships, or how teachers might go about assessing the quality of intelligence encoded in the metaphorical nature of language.

A Post-Cartesian Metaphor

I have suggested some of the conceptual boundaries of Cartesian thought without explicitly naming an alternative metaphorical framework. One alternative is found in Gregory Bateson's (1972) efforts to develop an ecological understanding of the mind. An ecology metaphor has been used before in education (see, for example, Goodlad, 1987), but curricularists have yet to work through how it generates distinct ways of thinking about language, the individual, and rationality.

Basic to defining an ecology are the relationships and interactions between the components within a system. Bateson (1972) characterizes such interactions in terms of information exchanges where information is understood not as thing-like (an object or an impulse) but rather as "a difference that makes a difference." Given this understanding, a process of information exchange (such as language) cannot be adequately explained by the same linear, cause-effect model that explains how one car

striking another might send it skidding across the road and into a ditch. Instead, when differences make a difference they do not stop at the receiving end of the model, but continue circulating (making a difference) throughout the loop structures in the system.

A simple example of a self-corrective system can be used to illustrate this pattern of connectedness. The thermostat in a house or building is designed to respond to differences (a relationship) between an actual and ideal temperature; thus the thermostat-building represents a feedback loop structure. The behavior of the thermostat is determined by the behavior of other components in the system (e.g. a furnace or air-cooler) and by its own previous behavior. It has, in this regard, what Bateson calls a "determinative memory." In the case of language, this determinative memory is encoded in metaphors and forms of nonverbal communication that reproduce cultural patterns of thought worked out and firmly grounded in the past. For example, the architecture of the classroom, a longer than normal pause in the teacher's rhythm of speech, the downcast eyes of a student, the posting of class rules on the front chalkboard, the telling of a joke, and so on may all be differences that make a difference (information) within the classroom as an ecology of language, culture, and thought.

This process of information exchange at times contributes to the stability and adaptability of the system. But at other times it may force the system into runaway as when the misreading of

nonverbal cues leads a teacher and student into a confrontation that quickly escalates to undermine their relationship.

If we return for a moment to the thermostat example, this simple system can also be used to illustrate how an ecological framework recasts our understanding of the individual. It is only through a metaphorical trick of language that we come to think of the thermostat as controlling the temperature in a room or building. I have already noted that the thermostat's behavior is determined by other components in the thermostat-building system. Thus, from a systems perspective, it is equally appropriate to say that the temperature controls the thermostat as it is to say the thermostat controls the temperature. The implications of this circular logic Bateson (1972:316) notes in arguing that, "in no system which shows mental characteristics can any part have unilateral control over the whole. In other words, the mental characteristics of the system are immanent, not in some part, but in the system as a whole."

Our purpose or what we hope to explain in part determines where it makes sense to draw imaginary lines around a system and thus label it an individual. The significance of Bateson's ecological framework is that it opens the door to seriously thinking about how teachers and students are embedded within a cultural-historical context, and how the language of the classroom shapes patterns of implicit understanding. In addition, it opens the door to recognizing the classroom as a mental-symbolic ecology that has its own character, belief

systems, intelligence, and ethical nature. Students or teachers may well give individualized and diverse expression to experience, but they cannot remain wholly detached from these cultural-relational dimensions of classroom life.

This recognition of the individual as a part of a larger mental ecology also holds far-reaching implications for how we understand thought and rationality. Because the character, belief systems, and ethical nature of systems (i.e., communities) are culturally-grounded, they operate primarily at an implicit, taken-for-granted level of awareness. This image of thought stands in sharp contrast to Cartesian notions of rationality as explicit, highly self-conscious, and culture-free. Specifically, it views the mind not as an inner arena that mirrors the world and is thus separate from the world, but as very much in or a part of the world. In Bateson's (1972:461) words, "The individual mind is immanent but not only in the body. It is immanent also in pathways and messages outside the body; and there is a larger Mind of which the individual mind is only a subsystem." This view reconnects mind and nature where nature is understood to include the body as well as information exchanges that locate the body within a broader context. In another essay, Bateson (1972:483) argues that the unit of evolutionary survival is not the family line, subspecies, nor species, but the "organism plus environment," and, he continues:

> If, now, we correct the Darwinian unit of survival to include the environment and the interaction between organism and environment, a very strange and surprising identify emerges: <u>the unit of evolutionary survival turns out to be identical with the unit of mind</u>.

These efforts to rejoin mind, body, and nature caution us against anthropocentric biases, and offer a fresh perspective on our own interdependence. Yet they are perhaps most significant in providing criteria that educators and educational researchers may use in determining which particular elements of our tacit knowledge are most worth bringing forward for explicit consideration and reconceptualization. We cannot simultaneously make explicit the vast array of backgrounded beliefs that underpin understanding; that would lead to total confusion. Still, by highlighting particular aspects of language, such as how humor is used to reinforce gender stereotypes, we can contribute to a process of cultural renewal. This point is also related to my earlier claim that not all metaphors are created equal. To quote Bateson (1972:484) once again:

> There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds, and it is characteristic of the system that basic error propagates itself. It branches out like a rooted parasite through the tissues of life, and everything gets into a rather peculiar mess. When you narrow down your epistemology and act on the premise "What interests me is me, or my organization, or my species," you chop off consideration of other loops of the structure. You decide that you want to get rid of the by-products of human life and that Lake Erie will be a good place to put them. You forget that Lake Erie is a part of <u>your</u> wider eco-mental system -- that if Lake Erie is driven insane, its insanity is incorporated in the larger system of <u>your</u> thought and experience.

The conduit view of language as well as notions of the autonomous individual and of technical rationality are, I believe, further examples of such basic error.

Metaphor and Qualitative Research

As suggested above, the primary implications of an ecological perspective rest in the evaluative criteria that this perspective brings to qualitative inquiry. In order to state these criteria explicitly we would ask about the capability of research in helping us recognize otherwise taken-for-granted patterns that connect culture, mind, and nature. Such criteria necessarily blur the distinction between the process and product of inquiry. By asking how insightful or telling research is, we are concerned with the process of learning to see, hear, and feel in ways that are more sensitive that would otherwise be possible.

In the classroom this process might involve learning to recognize the power of language. How, for example, do metaphors presented in text materials, courseware, or a class discussion reproduce cultural stereotypes? Our inquiry might also involve developing a sensitivity to how patterns of turn-taking, the use of humor, the privileging of the written word over the spoken word, and forms of nonverbal communication (gestures, tone of voice, posturing) frame classroom instruction. And finally, we might give close attention to what students learn from these frames about their relationships with one another, their teachers, and the curriculum.

These aspirations are not simply a matter of learning about classroom life. Researchers, to reiterate may main point, are in the world and not separate from it. To put this another way, our

task is to reclaim bit by bit an organic understanding of who we are. Our research community, like the classroom, represents an ecology of ideas and relationships that are implicitly communicated by the metaphors, tone, posture, and positioning of our work. These implicit lessons of inquiry--the manner in which research is framed--are the primary level of communication to which we and others respond.

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